

Chefs, Cooks, and Food Preparation Workers

(0*NET 35-1011.00, 35-2011.00, 35-2012.00, 35-2013.00, 35-2014.00, 35-2015.00, 35-2021.00)

Significant Points

- Many young people worked as cooks and food preparation workers—almost 20 percent were between 16 and 19 years old.
- More than 2 out of 5 food preparation workers were employed part time.
- Job openings are expected to be plentiful, primarily reflecting substantial replacement needs in this large occupation.

Nature of the Work

Chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers prepare, season, and cook a wide range of foods—from soups, snacks, and salads to entrees, side dishes, and desserts—in a variety of restaurants and other food services establishments. Chefs and cooks create recipes and prepare meals, while food preparation workers peel and cut vegetables, trim meat, prepare poultry, and perform other duties such as keeping work areas clean and monitoring temperatures of ovens and stovetops.

In general, *chefs* and *cooks* measure, mix, and cook ingredients according to recipes, using a variety of pots, pans, cutlery, and other equipment, including ovens, broilers, grills, slicers, grinders, and blenders. Chefs and head cooks also are responsible for directing the work of other kitchen workers, estimating food requirements, and ordering food supplies.

Larger restaurants and food services establishments tend to have varied menus and larger kitchen staffs. They often include several chefs and cooks, sometimes called assistant or line cooks, along with other lesser skilled kitchen workers, such as *food preparation workers*. Each chef or cook works an assigned station that is equipped with the types of stoves, grills, pans, and ingredients needed for the foods prepared at each station. Job titles often reflect the principal ingredient prepared or the type of cooking performed—*vegetable cook*, *fry cook*, or *grill cook*.

Executive chefs and *head cooks* coordinate the work of the kitchen staff and direct the preparation of meals. They determine serving sizes, plan menus, order food supplies, and oversee kitchen operations to ensure uniform quality and presentation of meals. The terms chef and cook often are used interchangeably, but generally reflect the different types of chefs and the organizational structure of the kitchen staff. For example, an *executive chef* is in charge of all food service operations and also may supervise the many kitchens of a hotel, restaurant group, or corporate dining operation. A *chef de cuisine* reports to an executive chef and is responsible for the daily operations of a single kitchen. A *sous chef*, or sub chef, is the second-in-command and runs the kitchen in the absence of the chef. Chefs tend to be more highly skilled and better trained than cooks. Many chefs earn fame both for themselves and for their kitchens because of the quality and distinctive nature of the food they serve.

The specific responsibilities of most cooks are determined by a number of factors, including the type of restaurant in which they work. *Institution and cafeteria cooks*, for example, work

in the kitchens of schools, cafeterias, businesses, hospitals, and other institutions. For each meal, they prepare a large quantity of a limited number of entrees, vegetables, and desserts. *Restaurant cooks* usually prepare a wider selection of dishes, cooking most orders individually. *Short-order cooks* prepare foods in restaurants and coffee shops that emphasize fast service and quick food preparation. They grill and garnish hamburgers, prepare sandwiches, fry eggs, and cook French fries, often working on several orders at the same time. *Fast-food cooks* prepare a limited selection of menu items in fast-food restaurants. They cook and package batches of food, such as hamburgers and fried chicken, to be kept warm until served. (*Combined food preparation and service workers*, who both prepare and serve items in fast-food restaurants, are included in the *Handbook* statement on food and beverage serving and related workers.) *Private household cooks* plan and prepare meals in private homes according to the client's tastes or dietary needs. They order groceries and supplies, clean the kitchen and wash dishes and utensils. They also may serve meals.

Food preparation workers perform routine, repetitive tasks such as readying ingredients for complex dishes, slicing and dicing vegetables, and composing salads and cold items, under the direction of chefs and cooks. They weigh and measure ingredients, go after pots and pans, and stir and strain soups and sauces. Food preparation workers may cut and grind meats,



Food preparation workers slice and dice large quantities of vegetables and other foodstuffs for use in salads and other more complex dishes.

poultry, and seafood in preparation for cooking. Their responsibilities also include cleaning work areas, equipment, utensils, dishes, and silverware.

The number and types of workers employed in kitchens depends on the type of establishment. For example, fast-food establishments offer only a few items, which are prepared by fast-food cooks. Small, full-service restaurants offering casual dining often feature a limited number of easy-to-prepare items supplemented by short-order specialties and ready-made desserts. Typically, one cook prepares all the food with the help of a short-order cook and one or two other kitchen workers.

Grocery and specialty food stores employ chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers to develop recipes and prepare meals to go. Typically, entrees, side dishes, salads, or other items are prepared in large quantities and stored at an appropriate temperature. Servers portion and package items according to customer orders for serving at home.

Working Conditions

Many restaurant and institutional kitchens have modern equipment, convenient work areas, and air conditioning, but kitchens in older and smaller eating places are often not as well designed. Kitchens must be well ventilated, appropriately lit, and properly equipped with sprinkler systems to protect against fires. Kitchen staffs invariably work in small quarters against hot stoves and ovens. They are under constant pressure to prepare meals quickly, while ensuring quality is maintained and safety and sanitation guidelines are observed.

Working conditions vary with the type and quantity of food prepared and the local laws governing food service operations. Workers usually must withstand the pressure and strain of standing for hours at a time, lifting heavy pots and kettles, and working near hot ovens and grills. Job hazards include slips and falls, cuts, and burns, but injuries are seldom serious.

Work hours in restaurants may include early mornings, late evenings, holidays, and weekends. Work schedules of chefs, cooks and other kitchen workers in factory and school cafeterias may be more regular. In 2002, about 33 percent of cooks and 45 percent of food preparation workers had part-time schedules, compared to 16 percent of workers throughout the economy.

The wide range in dining hours and the need for fully-staffed kitchens during all open hours creates work opportunities for individuals seeking supplemental income, flexible work hours, or variable schedules. For example, almost 20 percent of cooks and food preparation workers were 16-19 years old in 2002, and almost 10 percent had variable schedules. Kitchen workers employed by schools may work during the school year only, usually for 9 or 10 months. Similarly, resort establishments usually only offer seasonal employment.

Employment

Chefs, cooks and food preparation workers held nearly 3.0 million jobs in 2002. The distribution of jobs among the various types of chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers was as follows:

Food preparation workers	850,000
Cooks, restaurant	727,000
Cooks, fast food.....	588,000
Cooks, institution and cafeteria	436,000
Cooks, short order	227,000
Chefs and head cooks	132,000
Cooks, private household	8,000

More than three-fifths of all chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers were employed in restaurants and other food services and drinking places. Nearly one-fifth worked in institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, and nursing care facilities. Grocery stores, hotels, gasoline stations with convenience stores, and other organizations employed the remainder.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most fast-food or short-order cooks and food preparation workers require little education or training; most skills are learned on the job. Training generally starts with basic sanitation and workplace safety subjects and continues with instruction on food handling, preparation, and cooking procedures.

A high school diploma is not required for beginning jobs, but it is recommended for those planning a career as a cook or chef. High school or vocational school programs may offer courses in basic food safety and handling procedures and general business and computer classes for those who want to manage or open their own place. Many school districts, in cooperation with State departments of education, provide on-the-job training and summer workshops for cafeteria kitchen workers who aspire to become cooks. Large corporations in the food services and hospitality industries also offer paid internships and summer jobs to those just starting out in the field. Internships provide valuable experience and can lead to placement in more formal chef training programs.

Executive chefs and head cooks who work in fine restaurants require many years of training and experience and an intense desire to cook. Some chefs and cooks may start their training in high school or post-high school vocational programs. Others may receive formal training through independent cooking schools, professional culinary institutes, or 2- or 4-year college degree programs in hospitality or culinary arts. In addition, some large hotels and restaurants operate their own training and job-placement programs for chefs and cooks. Most formal training programs require some form of apprenticeship, internship, or out-placement program that are jointly offered by the school and affiliated restaurants. Professional culinary institutes, industry associations, and trade unions also may sponsor formal apprenticeship programs in coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor. Many chefs are trained on the job, receiving real work experience and training from chef mentors in the restaurants where they work.

People who have had courses in commercial food preparation may start in a cook or chef job without spending a lot of time in lower-skilled kitchen jobs. Their education may give them an advantage when looking for jobs in better restaurants. Some vocational programs in high schools may offer training, but employers usually prefer training given by trade schools, vocational centers, colleges, professional associations, or trade unions. Postsecondary courses range from a few months to 2 years or more. Degree-granting programs are open only to high school graduates. Chefs also may compete and test for certification as master chefs. Although certification is not required to enter the field, it can be a measure of accomplishment and lead to further advancement and higher-paying positions. The U.S. Armed Forces also are a good source of training and experience.

Although curricula may vary, students in formal culinary training programs spend most of their time in kitchens learning to use the appropriate equipment and to prepare meals through actual practice. They learn good knife techniques, safe food-handling procedures, and proper use and care of kitchen equipment. Training programs often include courses in nutrition,

menu planning, portion control, purchasing and inventory methods, proper food storage procedures, and use of leftover food to minimize waste. Students also learn sanitation and public health rules for handling food. Training in food service management, computer accounting and inventory software, and banquet service are featured in some training programs.

The number of formal and informal culinary training programs continues to increase to meet demand. Formal programs, which may offer training leading to a certificate or a 2- or 4-year degree, are geared more for training chefs for fine-dining or upscale restaurants. They offer a wider array of training options and specialties, such as advanced cooking techniques or foods and cooking styles from around the world.

The American Culinary Federation accredits over 100 formal training programs and sponsors apprenticeship programs around the country. Typical apprenticeships last three years and combine classroom training and work experience. Accreditation is an indication that a culinary program meets recognized standards regarding course content, facilities, and quality of instruction. The American Culinary Federation also certifies pastry professionals and culinary educators in addition to various levels of chefs. Certification standards are based primarily on experience and formal training.

Vocational or trade-school programs typically offer more basic training in preparing food, such as food handling and sanitation procedures, nutrition, slicing and dicing methods for various kinds of meats and vegetables, and basic cooking methods, such as baking, broiling, and grilling.

Important characteristics for chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers include working well as part of a team, having a keen sense of taste and smell, and working efficiently to turn out meals rapidly. Personal cleanliness is essential, because most States require health certificates indicating that workers are free from communicable diseases. Knowledge of a foreign language may improve communication with other restaurant staff, vendors, and the restaurant's clientele.

Advancement opportunities for chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers depend on their training, work experience, and ability to perform more responsible and sophisticated tasks. Many food preparation workers, for example, may move into assistant or line cook positions. Chefs and cooks who demonstrate an eagerness to learn new cooking skills and to accept greater responsibility may move up within the kitchen and take on responsibility for training or supervising newer or lesser skilled kitchen staff. Others may move from one kitchen or restaurant to another.

Some chefs and cooks go into business as caterers or open their own restaurant. Others become instructors in culinary training programs. A number of cooks and chefs advance to executive chef positions or food service management positions, particularly in hotels, clubs, or larger, more elegant restaurants. (See the statement on food service managers elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Job Outlook

Job openings for chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers are expected to be plentiful through 2012; however, competition for jobs in the top kitchens of higher end restaurants should be keen. While job growth will create new positions, the overwhelming majority of job openings will stem from the need to replace workers who leave this large occupational group. Minimal education and training requirements, combined with a large

number of part-time positions, make employment as chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers attractive to people seeking first-time or short-term employment, a source of additional income, or a flexible schedule. Many of these workers will transfer to other occupations or stop working, creating numerous openings for those entering the field.

Overall employment of chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations over the 2002-12 period. Employment growth will be spurred by increases in population, household income, and leisure time that will allow people to dine out and take vacations more often. In addition, growth in the number of two-income households will lead more families to opt for the convenience of dining out.

Projected employment growth, however, varies by specialty. The number of higher-skilled chefs and cooks working in full-service restaurants—those that offer table service and more varied menus—is expected to increase about as fast as the average. Much of the increase in this segment, however, will come from more casual rather than up-scale full-service restaurants. Dining trends suggest increasing numbers of meals eaten away from home, growth in family dining restaurants, and greater limits on expense-account meals.

Employment of fast-food cooks is expected to grow more slowly than the average. Duties of cooks in fast-food restaurants are limited; most workers are likely to be combined food preparation and serving workers, rather than fast-food cooks. Employment of short-order cooks is expected to increase about as fast as the average. Short-order cooks may work a grill or sandwich station in a full-line restaurant, but also may work in lunch counters or coffee shops that specialize in meals served quickly.

Employment of institution and cafeteria chefs and cooks will show little or no growth. Their employment will not keep pace with the rapid growth in the educational and health services industries—where their employment is concentrated. In an effort to make “institutional food” more attractive to office workers, students, staff, visitors, and patients, offices, schools and hospitals increasingly contract out their food services. Many of the contracted food service companies emphasize simple menu items and employ short-order cooks, instead of institution and cafeteria cooks, reducing the demand for these workers.

Employment of chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers who prepare meals-to-go, such as those who work in the prepared foods sections of grocery or specialty food stores, should increase faster than the average as people continue to demand quality meals and convenience.

Earnings

Wages of chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers vary greatly according to region of the country and the type of food services establishment in which they work. Wages usually are highest in elegant restaurants and hotels, where many executive chefs are employed, and in major metropolitan areas.

Median hourly earnings of chefs and head cooks were \$13.43 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$9.86 and \$19.03. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.66, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$25.86 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of head cooks and chefs in 2002 were:

Other amusement and recreation industries	\$18.31
Traveler accommodation	17.03
Special food services	13.98
Full-service restaurants	12.70
Limited-service eating places	10.49

Median hourly earnings of restaurant cooks were \$9.16 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.64 and \$10.93. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.58, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$13.21 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of restaurant cooks in 2002 were:

Traveler accommodation	\$10.49
Other amusement and recreation industries	10.45
Special food services	9.77
Full-service restaurants	9.14
Drinking places (alcoholic beverages)	9.03
Limited-service eating places	8.08

Median hourly earnings of institution and cafeteria cooks were \$8.72 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.06 and \$10.83. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.10, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$13.34 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of institution and cafeteria cooks in 2002 were:

General medical and surgical hospitals	\$10.01
Special food services	9.89
Community care facilities for the elderly	9.10
Nursing care facilities	8.95
Elementary and secondary schools	7.89

Median hourly earnings of food preparation workers were \$7.85 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.72 and \$9.43. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.96, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$11.37 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of food preparation workers in 2002 were:

Elementary and secondary schools	\$8.74
Grocery stores	8.43
Nursing care facilities	7.94
Full-service restaurants	7.66
Limited-service eating places	7.07

Median hourly earnings of short-order cooks were \$7.82 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.69 and \$9.59. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.93, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$11.25 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of short-order cooks in 2002 were:

Full-service restaurants	\$8.29
Drinking places (alcoholic beverages)	7.85
Other amusement and recreation industries	7.74
Gasoline stations	7.04
Limited-service eating places	6.97

Median hourly earnings of fast-food cooks were \$6.90 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.16 and \$8.03. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.68, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$9.13 per hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of fast-food cooks in 2002 were:

Special food services	\$7.79
Full-service restaurants	7.19
Gasoline stations	7.02
Limited-service eating places	6.84

Some employers provide employees with uniforms and free meals, but Federal law permits employers to deduct from their employees' wages the cost or fair value of any meals or lodging provided, and some employers do so. Chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers who work full time often receive typical benefits, but part-time workers usually do not.

In some large hotels and restaurants, kitchen workers belong to unions. The principal unions are the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union and the Service Employees International Union.

Related Occupations

Workers who perform tasks similar to those of chefs, cooks, and food preparation workers include food processing occupations, such as butchers and meat cutters, and bakers. Many executive chefs have primary responsibility for selecting menu items and share other tasks with food service managers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service.

Career information about chefs, cooks, and other kitchen workers, as well as a directory of 2- and 4-year colleges that offer courses or programs that prepare persons for food service careers, is available from:

► National Restaurant Association, 1200 17th St. NW., Washington, DC 20036-3097. Internet: <http://www.restaurant.org>

For information on the American Culinary Federation's apprenticeship and certification programs for cooks, as well as a list of accredited culinary programs, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

► American Culinary Federation, 180 Center Place Way, St. Augustine, FL 32095. Internet: <http://www.acfchefs.org>

For general information on hospitality careers, contact:

► International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education, 2613 North Parham Rd., 2nd Floor, Richmond, VA 23294. Internet: <http://www.chrie.org>